

EXODUS—WEEK 13

MEET THE LORD



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is an anonymous work,
on display at Museum Catharijneconvent, in Utrecht, Netherlands*

Having been supernaturally delivered from slavery in Egypt—and for the Egyptian army—and having been supernaturally fed by manna, now the Israelites are ready to really encounter their creator and deliverer.

It's time to learn what this is all about.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Exodus 19:1–20:6 — Meet the LORD
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1 Exodus 19:1–6

In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Wow, a kingdom of priests. Imagine what Israel might have been. The whole world would have been transformed by them as they ministered to all the nations.

But the promise is conditional—they must *obey My voice and keep My covenant*. They won’t, and this will become the main storyline of the entire Old Testament.

Israel will be repeatedly refined by trials as God pounds into them their dependence on Him. It’s a single lesson taught from a hundred different angles.

But this kingdom of priests does finally come to pass. It’s us. We are God’s ministers to all the nations. The whole world is supposed to be blessed by us.

But are they? When non-Christians think of Christians, are they glad we’re here? Often not, though the reasons vary and some (e.g. media bias) are just part of the playing field.

But notice the key given here to being a nation of priests—“*if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant.*” The doctrine of salvation by faith alone doesn’t take this away.

To be a serious Christian, you have to be serious.

Think about that “*obey My voice*” part. Is there an area in your life that you are refusing to turn over to Him? Ask God to help you see it.

Note: this may not involve outright resistance to the LORD’s leading. I had a recent failing where I simply didn’t notice His voice. Part of “*obey My voice*” is “hear My voice,” or even just “pay attention.” Being busy on a project tends to suck up all my attention; I forget who I am, and “whose” I am.

Is there a part of your life that you just assume God isn’t interested in?

Or is there a part that you’re so confident in that you’re not looking for His guidance?

That last one was my mistake.

2 Exodus 19:7–15 (ESV)

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.”

When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD, the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.” So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. And he said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.”

The people have given the right response to the LORD’s pronouncement of a new covenant and now He’s going to give them a treat. They will get to hear the voice of God as he talks to Moses. What would you give to experience that, eh?

This requires some serious preparation and consecration. Since the temptation to get too close will be almost irresistible, the mountain must be fenced. Picture yellow police tape running all the way around the mountain. “DO NOT CROSS,” it says, in big black letters. Anyone or anything that crosses the police line dies—instantly—no excuses, no appeals.

And everyone needs to wash up and put on their Sunday best.

Focus.

We tend to forget what a privilege it is to be a Christian. God rescues us from the pit of our depravity and starts a relationship with us—as if we have something to offer. We start to grow and get in closer contact with Him. We’re clueless, but we make progress.

Just marvel at the absurdity of grace. The potter turns ugly clay in to something beautiful. That’s what potters do, but the clay gets to be transformed.

We don’t get selected by the potter because we’re the clay that looks the most like a pot; we’re selected because transforming us would glorify Him. How blessed is that?

But the potter isn’t done yet. A pot must be fired in a kiln to be permanently transformed.

That final step is the tough one.

3 Exodus 19:16–25 (ESV)

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.” And Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.’” And the LORD said to him, “Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.” So Moses went down to the people and told them.

Moses has been here before. Mount Sinai is the same as Mount Horeb—where a burning bush told Moses to liberate his people. Now the whole mountain is filled with smoke and thunder and lightning. *The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.* What does that mean? What’s so different about the smoke and why is that worth mentioning?

A kiln (or “furnace” in some translations) burns hotter than an open fire. The smoke rises fast and straight in a column. It doesn’t look like a forest fire.

But a forest fire is what you’d expect here, especially since it seems to have been started by lightning. No other kind of fire makes sense anyway. Thus, this hotter, stronger fire has an intimidating, unnatural feel. Just as the burning bush was striking because it wasn’t consumed, this fire is scary because it’s so strange.

The whole scene just tingles with supernatural power.

We memorize all the verses about God’s power and we understand it, but we don’t pray like we expect Him to use it. We know that God can do anything, but we shrink from bold prayer.

Consider revisiting an old prayer request that was never granted—one that you wanted with all you heart, but God seemed to say, “no.”

Now if God really did give you a clear “no,” that’s one thing, but if the “no” was simply that you’re still waiting for God to act, then don’t give up. Some of the most glorious answers to prayer take years.

God’s timing is not our timing.

4 Exodus 20:1–3

And God spoke all these words, saying:

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

This passage makes more sense in Hebrew. It literally says, “You shall have no other gods in my face.”

The English translation sounds more like the LORD wants to be first among gods. Actually, the commandment is more like when a parent says, “I’d better not see any ...”

This commandment has to be first. Without this solid foundation, the other commandments don’t have a point of reference. Since all other gods aren’t real, they have no significance other than evidence of overactive imaginations.

Someone who views the LORD as just one among many gods is too confused to understand anything else.

Jesus made an important extension.

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” — Matthew 6:24 (NKJV)

So, with silly statue worship pretty much a thing of the past, *other gods* in Exodus 20:3 now means anything that controls you—money, exercise, golf, etc.

Most of these are normal. It’s good to manage your money wisely. There’s nothing wrong with exercising or playing golf. Healthy activities are great; just don’t be a slave to them.

Unfortunately, our fallen nature makes us naturally obsessive. We act like we don’t want the Lord to control our entire lives; yet we let other things control us. Isn’t that what the word “Lord” is about?

Thus our battle with sin isn’t just about the bad things we do. We need to check on the good things to see if they have become sinful obsessions.

And the frightening thing is, obsessing over some good thing can be worse than the things we normally think of as sinful. This is tricky stuff. Anything can be twisted by our sinful nature into a problem. Everyone has something they are really “into.” Is that sinful?

No. The question is, “Do you control it, or does it control you?” For example, do you exercise when you’re sick and you probably shouldn’t be exercising? Do you play golf when the weather makes it no fun? Do you check your investments constantly? Whatever it is, can you take a break from it for a while to do other things without that stressing you out? Is your “thing” fun or necessary?

Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and root out other gods.

5 Exodus 20:4–6

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

At first glance, this commandment seems to ban all religious art. But that can’t be it because God will soon specify art objects for the tabernacle.

The key to understanding this passage is to recognize the distinctions between this commandment and the first. This one isn’t about worshipping other gods; it’s about how to worship the real one. Of course, it’s possible to break both commandments at the same time, but this one is principally about not misrepresenting the true God.

We don’t know what God looks like but we want to and can’t seem to resist the temptation to experiment with the idea. Images make us complacent and too “buddy-buddy” with God. Consider these descriptions of actually being in the presence of God.

And he said, “Please, show me Your glory.”

Then He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you.” ... But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” And the LORD said, “Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.” — Exodus 33:18–23

So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.” — Isaiah 6:5

The closest thing in modern medicine to this is radiation sickness. Looking upon God is depicted a bit like looking at a nuclear bomb. Remember, people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki **literally** had their faces fall off.

But that’s not what God looks like either; that description is just to get your attention. Turning the bomb idea into a mental image of God would be exactly the kind of error we must avoid.

You can’t visualize God.

Christians are often insufficiently intimidated by the LORD. We get bumper stickers that say things like, “God is my co-pilot.”

Seriously? Are you training God to be a pilot?

Be awed by His majesty and holiness in your meditations.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. When have you failed to heed, or even notice, God's direction?
2. Have you ever had a big moment you had to work hard to get ready for?
3. What was the most curious, creative, or bizarre response to prayer you've ever seen?
4. What things do you do that you wonder if you do them too much?
5. What is your mental image of God? How is it wrong?